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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and examines a textual practice of female address in music video, and considers its appeal among a social audience of female adolescents. Textual strategies that inflect, appropriate, or bypass the prevailing male adolescence discourse on the American music video channel, MTV, are presented from the standpoint of their relationship to female adolescent experience and their capacity to articulate, in symbolic form, cultural meanings that adolescent girls find particularly significant. Textual practices are described that coalesce in the video texts of four female pop musicians (Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Pat Benatar, and Tina Turner), and responses by adolescent females to each of these four videos are analyzed and discussed. Three characteristic features of female address videos are considered: (1) their ability to demonstrate a multidimensional and nuanced textuality; (2) their facility for offering rich and varied addresses to the conflict girls experience between, on the one hand, the destructive and limiting aspects of gender inequality, and on the other, the expressive culture of gender difference; and (3) their use of two interrelated modes of address, i.e., access signs and discovery signs. (22 references) (CGD)

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FEMALE ADDRESS IN MUSIC VIDEO:

VOICING THE DIFFERENCE DIFFERENTLY

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This paper identifies and examines a textual practice of female address in music video and considers its appeal among a social audience of female adolescents. Female address in the context of this analysis, refers to textual strategies that inflect, appropriate, or by-pass the prevailing male adolescence discourse on the American music video channel, MTV. Each textual strategy of female address relates to, or is readable in terms of, female adolescent experience. The texts articulate, in symbolic form, cultural meanings which adolescent girls find particularly significant.

My emphasis on gender experience as a basis of textual address and readership competency is indebted to feminist interventions in media criticism and British youth culture studies. Early feminist film criticism in Britian and the United States recognized gender as a social construction influencing textual production and interpretive practices, but it failed to adequately theorize female experience. De Lauretis (1984) makes this point and suggests that an understanding of the social experiencing of gender difference by women is crucial to the critical assessment of female address. Rejecting certain psychoanalytic and structuralist conclusions as essentially determining and objectifying female representation and spectatorship, de Lauretis opts for a cultural explanation.

British culturalism has provided much of the impetus for the consideration of 'lived experience' as an analytical construct. The notion informs much of the work on working-class history and culture, including analyses of youth culture. In studying how youth live and express their social experience through culture,

British scholars have tended to look at class structure rather than gender relations. McRobbie (1976, 1980, 1984) is one of the most outspoken critics of this tendency in the youth culture literature. She takes British youth culture scholars to task for ignoring the place of female youth in cultural expression. If subculture critics find girls to be peripheral cultural participants, says McRobbie (1980), it is because they fail to grasp the different, but complementary ways in which girls organise their cultural lives. McRobbie's work, and the work of other feminist culture critics, demonstrates that while adolescence binds boys and girls in an ideology of lifestage, gender guides them towards separate spheres of experience.

I believe using the notion of gender experience as a basis from which to analyze a textual practice of female address produces a number of theoretical benefits. It activates the role of women and girls in cultural production. It allows for the treatment of authors and audiences as social subjects whose textual participation involves more than the enactment of industrial and economic imperatives. It argues for the interactivity of relations between authors, texts, and audiences. It focuses on the lived social context in which texts and textual meanings are produced, and demonstrates the connection of mediated texts to social practice. And it reveals a textual struggle for meaning, thereby foregrounding the hegemonic process and the involvement of mediated texts in it.

The textual practice I describe coalesces in the video texts of four female pop musicians: Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Pat Benatar, and Tina Turner. The individual videos demonstrate a

multi-dimensional and nuanced textuality. Organizing their discourse around the central concern of gender experience, they richly and variously address the conflict girls experience between, on the one hand, the destructive and limiting aspects of gender inequality, and on the other, the expressive culture of gender difference.

ACCESS SIGNS: NEGOTIATING GENDER INEQUALITY

Female address videos use two interrelated modes of address, what I call respectively: 1) Access Signs, and 2) Discovery Signs. Access signs are those in which the privilged experience of boys and men is visually appropriated. The female video stars textually enact an entrance into a male domain of activity and signification. In this way, the texts work at providing imagery that challenges assumptions about the boundaries which gender, as a social construct, draws around men and women. The texts operate symbolically to execute take-overs of male space, the erasure of sex-roles, and a demand for parity with male privilege.

1. STREETS.

McRobbie (1980) argues that gender discrimination actually mediates against girl participation in the street culture of boys. This, in effect, excludes girls from much of the leisure activities, social bonding practices, and subcultural formation that critics identify in male youth culture as important sites for the negotiation of social contradictions. Women are taught to use streets primarily as the route between two interior spaces, be they places of employment or consumption activity. The social consequence of street loitering or strolling is the

label, prostitute, and the coding of one's body as available to male pursuit. Women's level of comfort on city streets is tenuous at best: rape and harrassment are constant threats structuring their behavior. Girls learn early the gestures of deference: to avoid making eye contact, to cause one's body to 'shrink' so as to take up as little space as possible (Henley, 1977).

The street, then, a key symbol in MTV videos, relies on a decidedly male experience of adolescent leisure. In female address videos, the street becomes a representation appropriated for the production of access signs. In "Girls Just Want To Have Fun," access signs are structured around a symbolic taking back of the street by women. The bouncing Lauper leads a band of girlfriends through New York city streets in a frenzied snake dance that turns women's experience of foreboding streets upside-down in a carnavalesque display. Their arms reaching out for more and more space, the women push through a group of male construction workers who function as symbols of female harrassment on the street. The lyrical refrain, "Girls Just Want To Have Fun" enacts a powerful cry for access to the male privileged realm of leisure and fun.

Pat Benatar's video, "Love Is A Battlefield," presents a more militant version of the street take-over. Benatar's character is shown braving city streets at night, a homeless teenager, under the threat of male attack. Ending up in a bar, she is one of many women in the room slow dancing like a zombie, her head turned away from her various male partners in utter boredom. Her absolute lack of pleasure is apparent. The scene constructs

male/female relations as strictly reduced to a prostitute/trick/pimp configuration.

The turning point of the video is marked by the scream of a woman whose voice, laid unconventionally over the musical soundtrack, shrieks, "Leave Me Alone!" The image of a pimp physically reprimanding her stirs the Benatar character and her female counterparts to join together in action. A new dance succeeds. As lyrics sung by Benatar are heard: "we are strong, no one can tell us we're wrong," the women's aggressive chest thrusts and kicks force the pimp back against the bar. Benatar violently splashes a drink in his face, a moment that is formally prioritized by the addition of a sound effect. Unwilling or unable to retaliate, the pimp is successfully subdued. Benatar and her female comrades retreat to the street to demonstrate their solidarity and celebrate their defeat of the male ego. Benatar turns and saunters down the street, at last its rightful owner.

Madonna's "Borderline" creates access signs by immersing its star and female extras in male street-corner culture. Madonna is shown street dancing, spraying graffiti on urban walls, and loitering on a street corner with female peers. She blows kisses and initiates flirtation with street boys, and at the video's end, leads her girlfriends into the male turf of the pool hall.

Tina Turner enacts signs of access in the video, "What's Love Got To Do With It?" by taking a long, slow walk down a New York city street. Unlike the other videos, Turner's does not amass a group of females for a final appropriation of male space.

It is as if this has already happened. Rather, the video picks up where the Benatar video ends: Turner is from the beginning alone on the street, already at one with it. Magically, Turner has acquired the status and knowledge to transcend the female experience of streets. Walking down the avenue, she encounters the stare of a male onlooker. Instead of averting her eyes or playing to the look, Turner matches his gaze with one of her own, and they circle momentarily in an equal exchange. Next she comes across a group of men shooting craps on the sidewalk, a representation of male street-corner culture. Pushing them aside, she recalls Lauper's similar action in "Girl Just Want to Have Fun." The video provides a stage for Turner's powerful and aggressive performance. By combining calculated gestures, a deliberate walking style, and eye-contact with the camera and other characters, she executes a strong on-screen presence that symbolically works to temper female street experience.

ii. DELINQUENCY.

Female address videos assume another position related to access by creating images of adolescent delinquency. Male and female youth have been articulated differently as social problems. As Brake (1985) describes: "Males have usually been involved with illegal activities such as theft or violence or vandalism, and females with sexual misbehavior...(p. 23)." The perception that girls are somehow 'less delinquent' than boys has generally resulted in the greater provision of social programs to male youth (Nava, 1984). Prostitution is a predominant mode of female delinquency, a form of behavior that is less visible than many male delinquint activities and easily misidentified. Girls

who engage in street loitering or walking, so called normal behavior for boys, can become easily associated with delinquency.

In female address videos, access signs, designed around the symbol of the street, implicitly raise issues related to cultural definitions of delinquency. The videos focus on the attention and resources that male youth, who are perceived as social problems, have historically received by placing female characters in male delinquent scenarios. These texts offer symbolic parity to female audience members who want to textual experience social disobedience. Representations of girls on streets challenge textual codes of prostitution and generally test the boundaries of female representation and signification.

In "Girls Just Want To Have Fun," the image of a 'problem girl' is implied in the opening scene. Lauper's character bounds home one morning after apparently staying out all night. Upon entering the home, she finds her mother (played by Lauper's own mother), hard at work preparing food in the kitchen. The lyric "when you gonna live your life right?" speaks what the mother is shown to feel. She expresses her distress over the daughter's flagrant disregard for appropriate feminine behavior, by breaking an egg over her heart.

"Borderline" places Madonna in the role of the male adolescent delinquent by showing her defacing property, loitering in 'bad neighborhoods,' and entering the pool hall. The image of street corner loitering and flirtation mixes with the iconography of the prostitute to confuse the reference. The tension between the two representations implicitly raises questions about how the code of prostitution is elaborated and about how representations

of females on the street might be revisioned.

"Love Is A Battlefield" investigates the code of the prostitute by placing Benatar's character in the situation of a teenager, cast out onto the street by an angry father. She fends for herself on streets, but is stared at and bumped by male passersby. Because she remains unassociated with the activities of male youth street culture, she is presented as ambiguously close to the image of the prostitute. Refusing to romantically participate in the slow dance with her male partner, her character careens ever closer to enacting the code. It is at that moment that the video switches to an alternate scenario. Benatar and her girlfriends explode into an organized vigilante squad to face off against the pimp. After the expression of female rage, the street reappears as a site for female comraderie and displays of female style. The access sign seems to say, "if women could share equally in the male adolescence discourse, then the code would be rewritten.

In "What's Love Got To Do With It?" Tina Turner challenges the prostitute code. Struting down the street, her mini-skirt, show of leg, and spiked-heeled shoes could operate to code her as a spectacle of male desire. Instead, the image she projects struggles for a different signification. It's easier to imagine the spikes as an offensive weapon than as a sexual lure or allusion to her vulnerability. Turner's control over her own body and interactions with others in the video, particularly with men, encourages a revaluation of her revealing clothes and high heels from indices of her objectification to signs of her own pleasure in herself.

III. STYLE.

Hudson (1984) describes adolescence as a discourse system at odds with cultural ideologies of female roles and behaviors. Girls in adolescence, she suggests, experience the contradiction in the form of conflicting expectations placed on them by adults. Social authorities, during this period girls' lives, ask them to demonstrate a drive for independence consistent with the cultural conception of adolescence as a transition from childhood to adulthood. But, simultaneously, they require girls to adhere to the conservative discourse of femininity by developing "a personality style of caring for others, looking after children, being gentle and unassertive (p. 42)."

Girls who are attracted to the more liberal adolescence discourse, who see it as an access path to male privilege, seek to align themselves with it symbolically and use style as their expressive language. McRobbie (1980) finds the focus on male style in subculture literature ironic given the historical investment of girls in style as symbolic expression. Girls learn early that wearing particular clothes is a highly charged activity that situates one's own desires against a host of social approval ideologies. From birth, the imposing of a gendered appearance by parents largely in the form of clothes, constructs and enforces gendered identities. Purchasing and dressing up in feminine clothes accompanies every major event in a girl's life from confirmation to prom night, until the arrival of the most fussed over ritual, the wedding with its expensive and rigidly defined attire. As girls age and experience physical body

changes, they discover relationships between modes of displaying the body and social response. They learn not only to please and to placate through personal appearance, but also to shock and to subvert.

Hudson (1984) suggests two ways in which the femininity discourse is typically resisted by girls: 1) through affecting an appearance and behavior that enacts the male adolescence discourse, or 2) through exaggerating codes of feminine appearance and mannerisms, a practice which often crosses over into sexual display. Hudson's analysis is fruitful in interpreting how the stylistic projections of the female musicians function as access signs for female adolescent spectators.

The star texts of the four musicians cluster around the two versions of enactment Hudson describes, at times blending the two together. The clearest use of the two distinct strategies is demonstrated by the Madonna and Cyndi Lauper. Madonna's visual style engages with and hyperbolizes the discourse of femininity. She combines contradictory accoutrements of a feminine presentation with the affected attitude of a cinematic vamp. Bleached blonde hair proudly displays its dark roots. Glamour eye make-up and lipstick create a look that is liked to Marilyn Monroe's, but a cocky demeanor exudes a self-assuredness and independence to counter the outdated, naive image. Skin-tight, lacy undergarments and crucifixes add up to a blasphemous, 'bad girl' affectation, particularly in a woman who, we are told in the promotional press, hated the uniforms at her own Catholic school.

Lauper s image is more an ode to the adolescence discourse and incorporates a rebellious, anti-feminine, "she's so unusual" address. It is this sense of bucking the norm that Ms. magazine applauded by awarding Lauper a 'Woman of the Year' (1985) citation. In explanatory notes, Ms. characterized her rebellious style as a feminist stance. Lauper's display of odd color combinations in dress and hair, her wearing of gaudy fake jewelry, application of striped and sequined eye make-up, mock socially appropriate modes of female attire and behavior.

Members of the female social audience for these star texts have undoubtedly discovered for themselves the subversive potential of an aberrant personal style. Those who already construct appearances to undermine gender and social statuses must find affirmation in female address videos. For those who don't or can't, the stars' video image offers a different use value, instructing those viewers in the production of symbolic capital or offering vicarious participation through textual spectatorship.

DISCOVERY SIGNS: EXPRESSING GENDER DIFFERENCE

Access signs open out into discovery signs that rejoice in female forms of leisure and social bonding to which adolescent boys have little access. Discovery signs, which coexist and interact with access signs in each video, reference and celebrate distinctly-female modes of cultural expression and experience. This targeted address to girls and women attempts to compensate in mediated form for female cultural marginalization by drawing pictures of activities in which females tend to engage apart from males.

1. BEDROOM CULTURE AND BODY CHOREOGRAPHY.

Girl culture is typically defined in terms of its relation to male street culture and female gender oppression. Frith (1981), for example, acknowledges girl culture modes of dance and dressing up, but in strictly reproductive terms:

> ...all this female activity, whatever its fun and style and art as a collective occupation, is done, in the end, individually, for the boy's sake. It is the male gaze that gives girls' beauty work its meaning (p. 229).

But this does not account for the expressiveness of girl culture or for the ways it creates a complementary world of leisure and social bonding for girls. Social biases constructed around gender difference may push girls into less visible interior spaces, but it does not push them out of cultural expression.

McRobbie (1984) describes dance as a key source of bodily expression and control, pleasure and sensuality for girls. Dance, says McRobbie, offers girls "a positive and vibrant sexual expressiveness and a point of connection with the other pleasures of femininity like getting dressed up or putting on make-up (145)." Dance, it seems, is associated with a variety of experiences and events in girls' lives. The practice of learning and teaching each other specific dance steps is part of a wider participation by girls in the orchestration of body movement. Girls often spend hours practicing cheerleading routines, synchronized swimming moves, and 'double dutch' jumprope patterns. Choreographed movement serves as a means of

expressing girl friendships, defining female cultural practices, and negotiating social restrictions on the presentation and signification of the female body.

Female address videos create discovery signs by representing such girl practices, setting a tone that celebrates female resourcefulness and cultural distinctiveness. In "Girls Just Want To Have Fun," Lauper and her girlfriends are shown chatting on the phone in shots of luxuriously long duration. The camera records synchronized waving movements that the women create by swaying their bodies in unison, wrapped in intimate arm embraces. The women accomplish their symbolic take-back of the street by working the discovery sign, dance, into a source of authority. In the end, the construction workers they encounter on the street, their threatening status alleviated, are brought back to the Lauper character's home to experience female fun: dancing with wild abandon to records in one's bedroom.

Dance is also the form adopted by the women in the video "Love Is A Battlefield" to challenge the pimp's authority over female sexuality. Choreographed chest thrusts and kicks combine wild sexual energy with self-defense moves to mock and threaten the pimp. In "What's Love Got To Do With It?" Tina Turner uses a distinctive step and a calculated group of gestures to signify control over her own body. In the video, a shot of girls jumping rope in the street is intercut with the shot of men shooting craps to textually assert a complementarity between male and female street games.

Dressing up and dressing alike are other ways girls participate in body choreography and the expressing of girl

friendships. Dressing alike is a familiar practice at the time in a woman's life before heterosexual desire is rigidly channeled. Mother-daughter dresses are symbols of matrilineal identification and represent one of the few permissible expressions of mother-daughter love within the hegemony of the Oedipal construct. Griffin (1985) describes how dressing alike figures into the rich texture of girl friendships:

> These best friendships were typified by young women going everywhere together, walking along arm in arm, wearing EXACTLY the same clothes, shoes, hairstyles, even jewelry (p.61).

Female fans of female address videos extend the status of "best friend" to their favorite musician by displaying imitations of the star's dress and by mimicing their mannerisms. The most spectacular manifestations, the Madonna 'wanna-bes' and Lauper 'dress-alikes,' challenge assumptions about the invisibility of girl cultural expression and the passivity of female fans. The style imitators turn the tables on the critics' view of typical girl reactions to pop music stars:

> It is ...difficult for a woman to actually fantasize about BEING her hero in the same way a man could. With so few role models to follow, to fantasize about being on stage as a FEMALE performer may be almost a contradiction in terms. Instead, most of us dream of being a pop star's girlfriend: fame and recognition by proxy. Girls are taught to wait for men to give us what

we want, rather than to get it ourselves (Steward and Garratt, p.148).

Instead, the imitation of the 'star texts,' by girls forms the basis for communication among female fans. It signals membership in a group identity resembling the subcultures that British critics have described primarily as a male youth activity. The adopting of distinct star styles and incorporation of their textual meanings by fans encompasses the three interconnected features that Brake (1985) identifies as features of subculture: 1) image, the projection of an identity through costuming, make-up and other visual material; 2) demeanor, the mode of stance, pose, performance, in effect, the way the image is worn; and 3) argot, a special vocabulary and delivery style. The female fans of female address videos enact the look of 'their' star in a collective negotiation of the ideological and philosophical stances they interpret from the video texts.

But to consider the dress-alike and wanna-be fans as a subcultural manifestation is to challenge several underlying assumptions in the literature. Much of the British work on subculture places theoretical emphasis on class as the determining social structure dictating subcultural form. Yet, the female fan response derives primarily from an association with gender and female expressions of culture. Likewise, a focus on authencity in the subculture literature devalues the diffusion of subcultural style into mass media representations and marketplace reproductions. But, in the case of female address video fans, their spectacular response arises directly out of member interaction with mass media texts. It

demonstrates the correspondence between the video address and its reception, and more generally, between mediated texts and social practice. The fan response also integrally involves the marketplace as a point of reference as if to assert shopping and fashion as an authentic arena of female culture.

ii. CONSUMER GIRL CULTURE

Consumption practice has historically involved women in the production cycle and offered modes of symbolic expression and renewal. Carter (1985) suggests that by "charting the labyrinth of female market practices, we will be led to girls and women within and outside subcultures, all of whom participate in the regulation and organization of market processes (p.189)." In this way, she extends McRobbie's discussion of bedroom culture, by arguing that girls produce culture in and through the marketplace.

Fashion is one marketing area that involves girls not just as consumers, but as active cultural participants. Girls' involvement with fashion and the personal use of style puts them in an active relation to the marketplace, thereby insuring a level of recognition and respect among ready-to-wear manufacturers and distributors. Girls treat fashion as a symbolic text from which to create their own cultural meanings and uses. For some girls, knowing what's current, tracing cultural influences on designs and designers, participating in the popularity of certain fashions, becomes a form of private communication much like male sports talk. Others engage in fashion by constructing fantasies and personalities from its

discourses of style and celebrity.

Fashion is incorporated into female address videos as a discovery sign both in narrative scenarios and through the style projections of the videos' stars. "Borderline," moves into discovery signs in its presentation of the female fantasy of becoming a fashion model. In the video, a fashion photographer 'discovers' the character played by Madonna during the first street dance scene. She participates in the excitement and pleasure of wearing glamorous clothes and make-up, until the male photographer begins to assert his authority over her 'look.' Desiring to manage her own image, she returns to participate with boys in street culture. Later Madonna videos rely on discovery signs to a greater extent, dwelling on the recognition that fashion and made-up faces achieves for women.. In "Material Girl," a peak performance by Madonna, draped in jewels and male attendants, rewrites the tragic Marilyn Monroe image she references, into a decidedly female image of recognition and power.

Madonna and Cyndi Lauper have been among the stars most adept at creating styles that address adolescent girls immersed in consumer girl culture. Madonna manipulates the look of glamour and codes of high fashion into appropriations and recombinations that tap into viewer fascination with fashion models and the ability of celebrities to direct trends. Lauper wears thrift store and boutique renditions that recirculate fashions from the past. They call attention to the circularity of consumption, point out ways to construct personal style on a budget, and suggest how to exercize control over the terms of

prevailing fashion. The styles of the two stars articulate the tensions between conforming and resisting codes of gendered appearance, between following marketplace dictates and innovating fashion trends.

The Madonna 'wanna-be' and Lauper 'dress-alike' fans respond to the address of video and star texts from within their experience of consumer girl culture. They use style imitation as a meaning to 'win space' in the cultural site they consider their own--the shopping mall. The shopping mall is the place where fashion moves into commodity exchange, but it is also a focus for adolescent girl leisure practice. The mall provides "girl streets" that are relatively safe for females, even when unaccompanied. Mall corridors resemble city streets in both appearance and function. They offer the same active and anonymous sites for adolescent loitering and socializing as 'boy streets,' but within a more restricted and supervised setting.

It is not surprising, then, that the shopping mall has become the site around which female spectator participation in female address videos coalesces. "Madonna is everywhere," writes one biographer, "there is even a mall in California that people have nicknamed "the Madonna mall" because so many girls who shop there try to look just like her (p.8)." In response to the popularity of 'MadonnaStyle,' Macy's Department Store created a department called "Madonnaland" devoted to the cropped sweaters ($30), cropped pants ($21), and a variety of jewelry accessories such as crucifix earrings and outsize 'pearl' necklaces ($4-$59) resembling those worn by Madonna.

The department became the location for the mobilization of

Madonna fans in the summer of 1985 when Macy's sponsored a Madonna look-alike contest to coincide with the star's New York concert date. To provoke attendance, Macy's ran a full page ad in the Village Voice with text designed to capitalize on fan familiarity with Madonna's video, "Material Girl," and the movie, "Desperately Seeking Susan" in which she co-starred and performed the song, "Into the Groove."

JRS!
DESPERATELY SEEKING MADONNA LOOK-ALIKES

Join our Madonna Day contest, Thurs, June 6 in Madonnaland on 4, Macy's Herald Square. If you're a brassy material girl, get into the groove and prove it...

The overwhelming response was featured on both MTV and the ABC Evening News where Madonna 'wanna-bes' reveled in their new found fame. On camera, they gushed that they "wanted to be famous" and "to be looked at" like their idol, Madonna. For one magical moment, in front of Peter Jennings and ABC viewers, it came to pass.

The desire for fame and attention that such girl fans express relates back to their experience of gender inequality, back to the fact of their exclusion from male forms of cultural expression and male privilege. These are the conditions that access signs attempt to speak about and resolve symbolically in female address videos. Girls' desire for recognition as expressive cultural subjects in their own right is what discovery signs articulate and try to fulfill. The fans who exhibit imitative behavior not only demonstrate the connection of

spectators to mediated texts and their authors, but they show how that textual exchange carries over into everyday social practice. The 'wanna-bes' push for the recognition that boys receive through the symbolic discourse of consumer girl culture. They demand access to the male privileges of money, power, and authority that they find embodied in celebrities, but refuse to dispose of the expressive forms that female culture has provided. It is because female address videos have developed a sensitive and descriptive textual practice around the representation of female gender experience that adolescent girls have been given this opportunity to speak.

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